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Teens, Drugs, and Delinquency:  
A Partial Test of American Institutional  
Explanations of Crime

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Teens, Drugs, and Delinquency:  
A Partial Test of American Institutional  
Explanations of Crime

by

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Dissertation

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**Teens, Drugs, and Delinquency:**  
**A Partial Test of American Institutional**  
**Explanations of Crime**

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This study tests two macro-sociological theories of crime, which focus on the effects of perceptions of American social institutions. Both institutional legitimacy theory and institutional anomie theory contend that American social institutions are uniquely organized to affect American crime rates. Previous tests of these theories have focused on adult, serious offenses using aggregate units of analysis. The current tests focus on juveniles and low seriousness offenses. Using data from the *Monitoring the Future* Survey, the findings show that

delinquency is associated with juveniles' perceptions of three key American social institutions: the political system, the economic system, and the family. Although the results show mixed support, there is stronger evidence for institutional legitimacy theory than institutional anomie theory. The future directions of this research are discussed.

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## Chapter 1

### American Institutional Explanations of Crime

The idea that there are structural features in American society that cause crime is nothing new. Countless theorists have attributed crime to economic, political, and familial institutions that are highly concentrated in, if not unique to the United States. Some theorists contend that historical social changes factor into the way institutions affect American crime rates. Others argue that the American institutions and their cultural ethos impact crime rates. So what do these theorists contribute to our understandings of crime?

In this research, I investigate two of these theories of American social institutions and ask how does delinquency fit within the American institutional structure and what theoretical frameworks may shed light on it? Is delinquency inconsistent with belief in American social institutions? I address this question by testing two competing theories: Gary Lafree's theory of institutional legitimacy (*Losing Legitimacy: Street Crime and the Decline of Social Institutions in America*, 1998) and Steven Messner and Richard

Rosenfeld's institutional anomie theory (*Crime and the American Dream*, 2001).

These two recent macrosociological theories focus on American social institutions, namely the economic system, the political system, and family structure. Both theories contend that social institutions in the United States are uniquely organized compared with other nations. They both suggest that American social institutions are related to crime. However, there is a paradox: these theories differ in the direction of the predicted relationships between social institutions and crime.

According to LaFree's (1998) institutional legitimacy theory, perceptions of institutional legitimacy are negatively related to crime so that strong belief in the legitimacy or the authority of American social institutions is related to low levels of crime. Conversely, weak belief in the legitimacy of these institutions is associated with high levels of crime.

Messner and Rosenfeld's (2001) institutional anomie theory, however, suggests that all social institutions in the United States ultimately create an environment that is conducive to crime. The theory suggests that all such social institutions are organized to facilitate obtaining the

American Dream, which they define according to Robert Merton's (1968:190) definition "the pursuit of wealth and individual goals at any cost." Because this definition of the American Dream emphasizes goals, not means, ultimately, the American Dream creates an environment that is conducive to crime. Institutional anomie theory posits that the same societal forces and drives that cause people to succeed in conventional ways also cause crime. The American Dream itself creates both our heroes and our villains, which seems counter-intuitive to how most Americans think about crime. The idea here is that we all strive for success; some succeed in conventional ways, and others in unconventional or illegal ways.

In testing these theories, the focus is on addressing this general question: what is the relationship between American social institutions and delinquency? Further, is delinquency inconsistent with the perceived authority (or legitimacy) of American social institutions? Or can juveniles have strong beliefs in the authority/legitimacy of American social institutions and still commit delinquent acts?

Previous research on institutional anomie and institutional legitimacy theories have been macro-sociological, focusing on adult aggregate crime rates using national-level data. Moreover, this research has focused on

serious offenses. The present study uses both aggregate and individual-level data on juveniles and focuses on relatively petty offenses. There are a few reasons why the present study differs from previous research. First, research on the relationship between individuals' understandings of social structure and their behaviors can expand the range of the theories by extending them to microsociological units of analysis. Second, a focus on juveniles is also theoretically relevant. Both of the theories explain crime by adults, but data for high juveniles merit consideration as the differences between childhood and adulthood are largely arbitrary.

If there is something fundamentally flawed about the American Dream that fosters crime as much as it does "success," researchers should strive to find a way to understand it. Likewise, if there is something about our society's attempts to regulate institutions that result in delinquent behavior, as Lafree suggests, researchers should seek to understand it as well. It is important to examine whether in the United States institutions have a role in causing crime, either through the declining legitimacy Americans attach to them or through the nature of these institutions themselves.

## Organization of the Research

In Chapter 2, I review the two theories, institutional legitimacy theory and institutional anomie theory. Chapter 2 also summarizes: (1) previous research on the two theories and (2) the literature on American social institutions and negative behaviors, such as drug use and other forms of delinquency.

Next, the data, *Monitoring the Future*, are described in Chapter 3. This chapter also presents the variables and two main types of analyses that are used to test the two theories. Chapters 4 and 5 present the results of the present study. Chapter 4 focuses on the cross-sectional results for each year analyzed in the study. Chapter 5 presents the pooled cross-sectional findings. Chapter 6 concludes with a discussion of the findings, some limitations of the research, and some of the policy implications.

## Chapter 2

### Institutional Legitimacy and Institutional Anomie Theories

## Chapter 2

### **Institutional Legitimacy and Institutional Anomie Theories**

LaFree's (1998) institutional legitimacy theory and Messner and Rosenfeld's (2001) institutional anomie theory focus on the same types of variables. Both theories suggest that American social institutions are associated with crime. Both theories focus on the same key American social institutions, namely the economic system, the political system, and the family. Both theories contend that social institutions in the United States are uniquely organized compared with other nations, which may partially explain cross-cultural crime differences. However, the theories differ in the direction of the predicted relationships about social institutions and crime.

This chapter discusses the main tenets of the two theories. Because the theories are macrosociological with aggregate units of analyses, both theories require some modifications to be tested using individual-level data. The theoretical adaptations are presented next in this chapter. Finally, previous studies about American social institutions and crime are summarized. There have been few tests of Messner and Rosenfeld's institutional anomie theory, and none



have been conducted on LaFree's institutional legitimacy theory. However, some relevant research exists that has implications for the present study.

### **Institutional Legitimacy Theory**

According to LaFree's (1998) institutional legitimacy theory, strong beliefs in the legitimacy or authority of American social institutions are negatively related to crime. LaFree's theory is a revision of social control theory. Whereas social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) explains crime in terms of bonds to social institutions, LaFree (1998) uses the term "legitimacy" to describe the level of commitment individuals have to social institutions and addresses the mechanism through which social bonds are weakened. He asks: why do the attachments to social institutions weaken at particular points in time?

LaFree's (1998) central argument is that we can explain the increases and decreases in aggregate crime rates by looking at the strength of American social institutions and people's perceptions of those institutions. The historical and social changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century created institutional crises. LaFree (1998) argues that in the United States from the 1960s through the 1980s, the legitimacy of social

institutions declined. This loss of legitimacy led to a reduced capacity to regulate behavior and, in turn, has affected crime rates. LaFree (1998) maintains that institutional legitimacy stabilized during the 1990s, which partially explains the decrease in crime rates that began in the mid-1990s. LaFree (1998:6) defines institutions as "the patterned, mutually shared ways that people develop for living together." Institutions include rules, laws, norms, values, roles, and organizations that define and regulate human activities. Legitimacy involves "the ease or difficulty with which institutions are able to get societal members to follow the rules, laws, and norms" (6). Institutions with low legitimacy lack forced to encourage individuals to follow societal rules.

LaFree contends that temporal variation in crime rates is affected by institutions and their legitimacy in a three-phased process. First, institutions reduce individual motivation to commit crime. Second, institutions supply effective controls against criminal behaviors. Third, institutions provide individuals with protection against others' criminal behavior. When the institutional legitimacy of American structures declines, as it did during much of the post World War II era according to LaFree, the capacity for

institutions to control crime is lessened. Crime increases as Americans lose faith in the political system, the economic system, and the family.

For LaFree (1998:13), political institutions have one essential function in societies: "mobilizing people to get things done." However, crime increases when there is a decrease in individuals' faith in political institutions to accomplish societal tasks. LaFree (1998) contends that trust in American political institutions fell during the post World War II era. Historical events, including the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the Watergate scandal, damaged Americans' trust in their political institutions. LaFree (1998) points to indicators of changing attitudes and behaviors, such as trust in the federal government, voting practices, and participation in political protests.

Economic institutions also affect crime rates, according to LaFree (1998). He argues that the legitimacy of economic institutions has rapidly changed in the post World War II era. The biggest concern for LaFree (1998) is the growing disparities in wealth and income between classes, which he believes have characterized much of the post World War II era. LaFree (1998:119) maintains that "as economic inequality increases, crime rates will also increase."

The family is the last major social institution that LaFree (1998) discusses. Like social control theory, LaFree (1998:135) argues that "families typically have control over individuals earliest, longest, and most intensively." This control reduces criminal motivations, regulates behaviors through surveillance, and properly socializes children into law-abiding behaviors.

LaFree (1998) contends that rapid changes in family structures facilitated a decline in familial legitimacy. These changes include increases in female-headed households and divorce rates. "American families became less successful at preventing crime," according to LaFree (1998:139), "because, on average, traditional forms of the family lost legitimacy and were not immediately replaced by equally effective new forms." LaFree (1998) argues that the decline in the legitimacy of the family affected and was affected by the decline of political and economic institutions. The combined effects of these three social institutions on crime were recognized by policy makers, who responded with replacement institutions: the criminal justice system, education, and welfare. However, these institutions have not caused substantial decreases in crime rates, according to LaFree (1998).

## **Testing Institutional Legitimacy Theory**

Modifications in LaFree's (1998) theory are made in the present study. First, the theory only focuses on predatory crime and relies on aggregate data. LaFree (1998:33) sees little difference among predatory crimes: "My approach is to look for the common threads related to all seven of these [index] crimes rather than to concentrate on what appears to be much smaller individual differences." For instance, La Free (1998) states that when homicide rates increase, armed robbery rates, and burglary rates increase as well.

LaFree (1998) excludes less serious crimes primarily because of the lack of consensus about the seriousness of certain acts. For example, LaFree (1998) argues that there is little agreement about the seriousness of such "victimless" crimes as substance use, minor delinquency, and prostitution. Since there is little consensus as to these crimes seriousness, there is less institutional regulation of them.

LaFree's (1998) exclusion, however, is not consistent with his claim that all crime is affected by institutional legitimacy. Could the declining legitimacy theory explain other types of crimes, namely juvenile delinquency and substance abuse? Is LaFree's focus on predatory crimes merely a function of the data available to him?

LaFree (1998:147) argues that "institutions are most effective in regulating behavior for which there is widespread agreement." He notes that there is not widespread agreement about drug use as compared with other crimes, such as homicide. LaFree's (1998) argument about drug use may apply to adults, but not juveniles. Indeed, there is widespread agreement among Americans that juveniles should not use drugs, and this belief is supported by nearly 100 years of drug policy in the United States and American culture. While institutions may not be as effective at regulating drug use among adults or juveniles as they are at regulating homicide, institutions still may have an impact.

### **Institutional Anomie Theory**

LaFree (1998) suggests that the changes in institutional legitimacy in American society affect temporal variation in crime because institutions regulate individual behavior. Thus, when institutional legitimacy is weak, crime rates will be high; when legitimacy is strong, crime rates will be low. Messner and Rosenfeld (2001), however, examine the relationship between crime and institutions not in terms of institutional failure, but in terms of institutional success.

Messner and Rosenfeld's (2001) institutional anomie theory suggests that all social institutions in the United States ultimately create an environment that is conducive to crime. The theory suggests that all American social institutions are organized to facilitate obtaining the American Dream. In this case, Messner and Rosenfeld adopt Robert Merton's (1968:190) definition of the American Dream: "the pursuit of wealth and individual goals at any cost."

Messner and Rosenfeld base their theory of institutional anomie on the premise that what creates American heroes also creates American villains. "Crime in America," according to Messner and Rosenfeld, "derives in significant measure from highly prized cultural and social conditions" (2001:5). In their theory, the core of these highly valued conditions is embodied in the American Dream. Moreover, in American society, all social institutions are dominated by this drive toward the American Dream.

Messner and Rosenfeld build upon Merton's idea that there is an inherent materialism in the American cultural ethos that breeds crime. Thirty-five years ago, Robert Merton argued that American society breeds an insatiable desire for the accumulation of wealth. He stated that:

in the American Dream there is no final stopping point. The measure of "monetary success" is conveniently indefinite and relative...In this flux of shifting standards, there is no stable resting point, or rather, it is the point which manages to be "just ahead," (1968:190).

According to Merton, American society emphasizes unattainable goals while de-emphasizing the means through which goals are obtained. This disjunction between goals and means to achieve the American Dream fosters anomie, which causes crime. Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) adopt Merton's conceptualization of anomie as it relates to the American Dream. However, they differ from Merton. Merton only accounted for anomie in terms of unequal access to legitimate means for success; Messner and Rosenfeld argue that other components of the social structure also matter. They add institutional structure into their anomie theory, including the anomic pressures created by the political and the economic systems. The pressures exerted by these institutions directly result from the dominant cultural ideal: the American Dream. All Americans, regardless of social origins or social location, are encouraged to embrace the American Dream and may experience strain or anomie.

Messner and Rosenfeld (2001:5) define the American Dream as "a broad cultural ethos that entails a commitment to the



goal of material success, to be pursued by everyone in society, under conditions of open, individual competitions." While the focus of the American Dream according to this definition is ultimately monetary success, Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) also note that all American social institutions are organized to encourage success in all forms. An "anything-goes" mentality develops that affects all types of crime and delinquency.

It is also important to note that when previous sociological research has considered anomie, it often has focused on blocked opportunities. However, it is equally important in anomie theories that in American culture there is a lack of effective norms to regulate the pursuit of goals, regardless of opportunity. It is this lack of effective norms from Merton's theory that is emphasized in Messner and Rosenfeld's theory of institutional anomie.

Messner and Rosenfeld (2001:63) maintain that there are four characteristic values embedded in the American Dream: (1) the values of personal achievement, (2) individualism, (3) universalism, and (4) the "fetishism of money." They follow Merton's conception of personal goal achievement, arguing that societies that poorly regulate goal achievement are characterized by a state of anomie. Messner and Rosenfeld

(2001) contend that goal achievement is measured in society by the end achievement, not the means. This attitude of "winner take all" or "it's not how you play the game," is indicative of the American Dream, and it fosters both legitimate and illegitimate opportunities to achieve goals.

The second widely accepted characteristic of the American Dream is individualism, which is a deep-seated commitment to individual rights and autonomy. Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) argue that when individualism is combined with the drive for achievement, anomie or strain increases.

Third, the American Dream is characterized by universalism, meaning Americans' level of commitment toward realizing their own potential. Regardless of social stratification, all individuals can succeed and should believe in self-determined social mobility. Again, Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) argue that universalism contributes to anomie and consequently crime.

Finally, Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) use the concept of fetishism and apply it to the American obsession with money. "In American culture, success is signified in a distinctive way: by the accumulation of monetary rewards. Money is awarded special priority in American culture" (2001:63). While Americans are not uniquely materialistic, Messner and

Rosenfeld argue that "money is the 'metric' of success," which is unique to the United States (63). Combined together, these four characteristics contribute to a hedonistic treadmill: a never-ending drive for wealth accumulation.

The American Dream also has a fundamental proclivity toward economic inequality that produces strain or anomie. The American Dream creates pressures that cause crime as it encourages "an anomic cultural environment, an environment in which people are encouraged to adopt an 'anything goes' mentality in the pursuit of personal goals" (61). These anomic pressures are reified by the dominance of the economic structure in American society. Messner and Rosenfeld contend that the blending of cultural beliefs (commitment to the American Dream) and the power of the American economic institutions foster crime.

### **Testing Institutional Anomie Theory**

There are three noteworthy issues about testing Messner and Rosenfeld's (2001) institutional anomie theory. First, Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) emphasize macro-social processes and countries as units of analysis instead of individuals.

They argue:

Our objectives in this book are distinctly macro level in character. Indeed, it is precisely because the questions that we ask are questions about aggregate patterns of crime that we employ an explanatory framework built around basic properties of social organization, (2001:42).

Messner and Rosenfeld's argument lacks a thorough discussion of the role individuals play in creating and recreating the American Dream. They refer to the American Dream in a way that makes its message seem immutable and unchallengeable. They do not discuss the possibility of the American Dream being experienced differently. Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) give no attention to the individual reactions to as well as the interpretations of the American Dream.

Messner and Rosenfeld's (2001) lack of attention may not be important when aggregate units of analysis are used to test their theory. However, in the current study, individual-level data are used. Individual interpretations of the American Dream and the roles those reactions play in delinquency and substance abuse are vital to this research. According to Messner and Rosenfeld (2001), individual units of analysis tend to be measures of Merton's strain theory rather than institutional anomie. However, my research focuses on the most distinct quality of institutional anomie: institutions.

Second, Messner and Rosenfeld explain a narrow range of crimes. While they posit that their theory can explain all serious predatory crimes, they and others who have tested institutional anomie use the theory to explain homicide rates. I test Messner and Rosenfeld's theory using measures of delinquency and substance abuse.

Finally, Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) do not provide indicators or measures of institutions or other key concepts in their theory. Chamlin and Cochran (1995), for example, say that Messner and Rosenfeld's theory is difficult to test, even on the macro level. They contend that it is unclear how to measure the independent variables. In the current study, I rely on LaFree's (1998) suggestions to measure perceptions about American social institutions.

### **Previous Studies**

This section reviews two types of literature: (1) tests of institutional legitimacy and institutional anomie theories and (2) the relationship between American social institutions and delinquency.

To date, there have not been any empirical studies of LaFree's theory of declining institutional legitimacy, and there have been few tests of Messner and Rosenfeld's

institutional anomie theory. Chamlin and Cochran (1995) conducted a partial test of Messner and Rosenfeld's theory. They examined whether there are interactions among American culture, economic strain, and the ability of non-economic social institutions to control crime. With property crime rates as the dependent variable, Chamlin and Cochran (1995) used state-level data from the *Uniform Crime Reports* and the United States Census. Their measures of non-economic institutions included percentage of families below the poverty line, the divorce rate, church membership, and voting practices.

Chamlin and Cochran (1995) found that the effects of economic deprivation on crime are greatest when other social institutions are weak. Their findings are consistent with Messner and Rosenfeld's notion that economic institutional domination supercedes the impact of all other social institutions.

Savolainen (2000) also found support for Messner and Rosenfeld's institutional anomie theory from an examination of cross-national homicide rates. Savolainen (2000) contended that in nations where the economy dominates the institutional balance of power, economic inequality will have the strongest effect on homicides. Institutional balance was measured by

the amount of spending on state welfare programs as a percentage of total public expenditures. Savolainen (2000) found little evidence for a pure relative deprivation model. He instead found that the size of the population living significantly below the accepted standard of economic well-being may be the critical characteristic explaining the inequality effect in cross-national criminology.

Savolainen's (2000) study did not, however, address the questions raised in this research. Savolainen focused on macro social structural correlates of cross-national homicides. In this research, I apply this macro theory to individuals and relatively petty offenses. So while it is important to note that Chamlin and Cochran (1995), as well as Savolainen (2000), tested Messner and Rosenfeld's institutional anomie, they do not shed much light on the current research question. Instead, I turn to a wider body of literature on social capital and crime.

### **Related Studies: Social Capital and Belief Systems**

Theories of social capital use similar theoretical constructs as the theories addressed here and may offer insights about the relationship between social institutions and crime. Social capital is defined as the relationships individuals have to each other in order to achieve some

collective goal (Portes and Landolt, 1996; Rosenfeld et al., 2001). These relationships have been operationalized as "social trust" and "civic engagement." The concepts of social capital are measured with such variables as participation in community volunteer organizations and voting practices, which is consistent with the concepts in both theories tested here (Kennedy et al., 1998; Rosenfeld et al., 2001).

Rosenfeld et al. (2001) maintain that a decrease in social capital leads to an increase in anomie and consequently an increase in crime rates. Using data from the 1990 General Social Survey, they found social capital does have this predicted relationship with homicide rates. Likewise, Kennedy et al. (1998) found that decreases in social capital mediate the effects of income inequality on violence. Kennedy and his colleagues argue that income inequality erodes social capital. The erosion has broad effects on firearm violence, regardless of race and urban residence. This finding suggests that social capital is relevant for explaining violence across demographic groups despite differential experiences of and access to social capital.

These studies reviewed leave many unanswered questions. First, each of these studies uses aggregate data to explain crime rates. For example, Kennedy et al. (1998) argued that a



lack of social capital predicts variation in aggregate rates of homicide and other violent crimes. Rosenfeld et al. (2001) also examined homicide rates.

The present study uses both aggregate and individual-level data on drug use and delinquency to test LaFree's (1998) and Messner and Rosenfeld's (2001) theories. This is a departure from the studies reviewed not only in terms of the units of analysis, but also in terms of the type of crime. I hypothesize that these macro social variables will affect less serious lawbreaking, namely substance use and delinquency. This hypothesis is not unprecedented. Anderson (1999) found social buffers, such as membership in community organizations, to be negatively related to delinquency in urban areas.

Katz (2002) also looked at social capital and delinquency. She argued that troubled teens who experience reintegrative shaming have strong attachments to conventional institutions and consequently have more social capital. Katz hypothesized that adolescents with low social capital engage in violent behavior as well as substance abuse. Using the National Education Longitudinal Survey of eighth graders, she found that social capital indirectly decreases shame as well as decreases the effects of shame on violence, alcohol abuse, and marijuana abuse.

In addition to the research on social capital, there is also work on value or belief systems and delinquency. These studies are relevant to this research as they measure attitudes about investments in ideals of the American Dream. For example, Goff and Goddard (1999) examined the relationship among high school students between conventional values and delinquency, substance abuse, and sexual behavior. Their research focused on such values as enjoyment, self-respect and sense of accomplishment. They found that high school students valuing traditional core values, such as sense of belonging and strong attachment to others, committed less delinquency than those who value pleasure and excitement. However, Goff and Goddard's study did not directly address juveniles' subscription to values related to American social institutions.

Kenneth Levy's (2001) study looked at teenagers' attitudes toward authority institutions. Levy used a sample of non-delinquents, institutionalized delinquents, and non-institutionalized delinquents to study acceptance of family, school, and legal institutions. For each of the groups, Levy found teens' attitudes to be favorable toward each of the institutions measured. The non-delinquent sample had the most

positive attitudes toward these institutions, but the differences between the three populations were small.

From the above research, we can conclude that there are some significant gaps in the literature relating to American cultural values and crime. Previous research has not fully addressed the level of investment individuals have in the American Dream. Previous tests of institutional anomie theory, for instance, have examined the relationships between homicide rates and gross indicators of economic institutions. Social capital research accounts for social relationships and networks among individuals; this research does not concentrate on individuals' attachments to specific institutions. Research on values and belief systems has concentrated on only part of the ideals of the American Dream.

None of the above studies fully examines political and social institutions and the influence those institutions have on delinquency and substance abuse. Looking at the relationships among these variables allows for tests of Messner and Rosenfeld's and LaFree's theories on a micro level.

## **Summary**

To review, there are several parallels and discords between LaFree's theory and Messner and Rosenfeld's. Both LaFree (1998) and Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) emphasize the importance of American institutions in their theories. Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) contend that institutional legitimacy exacerbates crime rates; legitimacy does not prevent crime as LaFree (1998) describes. Both theories conceptualize institutions with references to political systems, economic systems, and the family. These theorists emphasize the interdependence between social institutions and focus on the uniqueness of 20<sup>th</sup> Century American social institutions.

What varies among these theorists is their understandings of the relationship between crime and institutions and the time frame used. Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) factor in cultural meanings into the role of institutions using cross-sectional data. LaFree (1998) accounts for historical changes in these institutions. LaFree argues that historical social changes affect the level of institutional legitimacy and consequently crime rates. Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) contend that historical change does not matter. They assume the impact of the American Dream is constant across time; and regardless of changes in crime rates, the impact is the same.

In this study, I test for the stability or fluctuations of the salience of the American Dream and of social institutions.

Both Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) and LaFree (1998) limit their theories to explaining "serious crimes," such as predatory crimes. However, they do not account for why these crimes should be distinguished from less serious or "relatively trivial offenses" (Messner and Rosenfeld 2001:43). Messner and Rosenfeld contend that the differences between minor and serious crimes are inherently arbitrary. Both theories may focus on these serious offenses due to data constraints. Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) focus on cross-national comparisons of crime. Data available from other countries are notably unreliable and invalid, save the extremely serious crimes (Neapolitan, 1997). Other crimes are excluded from analyses, according to Messner and Rosenfeld (2001), largely because of the data quality.

The current research tests the two theories using both microsociological and macrosociological data. However, the macrosociological data differ from those used in previous tests. Instead of comparing cross-national crime rates as LaFree (1998) and Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) did, this research employs a hybrid dataset that contains summary

information about delinquency and institutional legitimacy for separate years.

In addition, while Messner and Rosenfeld's theory is a macro-social structural theory, previous tests have shown that individual-level data may be useful in understanding the relationship between the American Dream and crime. Likewise, testing LaFree's theory of institutional legitimacy with micro-level data may be useful in understanding the relationship between American institutions and individuals' experiences with crime.

**Chapter 3**  
**Data and Methods**

## **Chapter 3**

### **Data and Methods**

There are several similarities and differences in the institutional legitimacy and institutional anomie theories. Both emphasize the importance of American social institutions. Institutional anomie theory contends that institutional legitimacy exacerbates crime rates, while institutional legitimacy theory posits that strong beliefs in the legitimacy of social institutions mitigate crime rates. Both theories emphasize the same social institutions: the economic system, the political system and the family. Both theories use the same independent and dependent variables. Therefore, both theories can be tested with the same dataset and variables.

Both institutional legitimacy theory and institutional anomie theory link aggregate trends in American institutional legitimacy and crime rates. This chapter focuses on restating LaFree's (1998) and Messner and Rosenfeld's (2001) aggregate theories of crime causation with individuals as the units of analysis. In this chapter, the dataset is first presented, followed by a discussion of the variables used in this study. This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the two kinds of analysis used in the research.



### **Data: *Monitoring the Future***

Previous tests of the institutional legitimacy and institutional anomie theories have used official crime data from the *Uniform Crime Reports* as well as other secondary data from studies on social institutions to show the relationship between crime and economic, political, and familial institutions. In the current study, I use a single dataset, *Monitoring the Future*, which contains information on self-reported delinquency, drug use, and beliefs about institutional legitimacy.

*Monitoring the Future (MTF)* is a survey that has been administered annually to a nationally representative sample of high school seniors since 1976. It was designed to capture information on drug use, other delinquency, and a variety of behaviors and attitudes that reflect the lifestyles of teenagers in the United States. Each year, *MTF* uses a multi-stage random sampling procedure through which random geographic areas are sampled. From those areas, random samples of public and private high schools are selected, and subsequently random samples of students are selected to answer the questionnaire. Each year the survey is administered to approximately 16,000 high school seniors representing approximately 133 high schools. From the inception of the

survey, *MTF* has had response rates varying from 66 percent to 84 percent. In more recent years, the response rates have been increasing steadily.

*MTF* consists of six separate survey instruments that are used with an approximate sample size of 2700 students per survey form. In the current study, I use Survey Form 2, which asks the most questions about attitudes on American social institutions and the most questions about self-reported delinquency. The current research employs data collected from 1976 through 2000.

#### **Data Limitations**

There is an important limitation of *MTF* that could affect the results of the study: the survey is administered only to high school seniors. Teenagers who have dropped out of high school may be more delinquent and more disenfranchised than those attending school. The researchers who created *MTF* acknowledge this limitation of *MTF* (Bachman and Johnston, 1978; Johnston et al., 1977). However, they contend that this group of high school dropouts is small, roughly 15-20 percent of all students on average (Bachman, 1991). Bachman and Johnston (1978) also argue that the bias remains relatively constant from year to year. Nevertheless, Bachman and Johnston (1978) have compared the findings from *MTF* with studies that

focus on dropouts and have found striking similarities between dropouts and stay-ins.

*MTF* also provides for excellent cross-sectional data analysis over a twenty-six year period. The question wording in the *MTF* surveys and response categories remain stable from year to year. Although some questions have been omitted and others added, those questions are not critical to the current research. For example, in 1976, the survey included items on Quaalude use. Once Quaaludes were no longer being manufactured by 1985, the questions were dropped. In more recent years, survey questions have been added about more recent drugs, such as 'Ice' and rock or crack cocaine. Since the current study focuses on variation over time as well as cross-sectionally, survey questions that were not asked for all years were excluded.

### **Independent Variables**

Lafree (1998) and Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) suggest that different types of social institutions may have different effects on crime. Recall that three of the most salient institutions in both theories are political institutions, economic institutions, and the family. *Monitoring the Future* collects data about all three of these social institutions.

There are two noteworthy issues to address in regard to institutional anomie theory's independent variables. First, although both theories use the same concepts, I rely on LaFree's (1998) suggestions for how to measure perceptions of American social institutions because they are not specified in Messner and Rosenfeld's theory. Second, institutional anomie's major argument is that there is a positive relationship between adherence to the American Dream and crime rates. In this study I am testing how high school seniors' perceptions of or beliefs about the American Dream are related to delinquency and drug use. However, there is no item in *MTF* that would directly capture this information about these perceptions or beliefs. Instead, I examine seniors' beliefs about the authority of dominant American social institutions. These institutions, according to institutional anomie theory, are the primary ways to translate the American Dream to individuals.

### **Family Institutions**

Form 2 of *Monitoring the Future* data provides only limited information on the legitimacy of families. Only one survey item is relevant: "If you marry, do you plan to stay married?" The response categories are (1) Very Unlikely, (2) Fairly Unlikely, (3) Uncertain, (4) Fairly Likely, and (5) Very

Likely. Such a one-dimensional measure may not capture much information about respondents' beliefs in the legitimacy of the family. However, it captures information about the legitimacy of divorce, and divorce is a key predictor of family institutional legitimacy for LaFree (1998). According to LaFree (1998), variation in divorce rates is strongly correlated with variation in rates of crime. He compares U.S. divorce rates and robbery rates to show that their trends are virtually identical; as divorce rates increase, so do robbery rates. In the current study, high school seniors' expectations of divorce should reasonably reflect their perceptions of family legitimacy.

### **Political and Economic Institutions**

Political legitimacy is measured by two scales. The first scale is comprised of five questions pertaining to the perceived legitimacy of governmental bodies. The second scale is comprised of five questions pertaining to perceived legitimacy of democratic participation (See Figure 3.1). Economic legitimacy also is measured by two scales. The legitimacy of consumption scale is comprised of responses to two statements, and the legitimacy of materialism scale is made up of responses to three statements (See Figure 3.1). Figure 3.2 lists the questions and response categories used in

the scales. Responses were recoded before creating the scales so that the highest values reflect the strongest belief in the legitimacy of an institution and the lowest values reflect the weakest belief.

**Figure 3.1: Scales of Perceived-Political and  
Perceived-Economic Institutional Legitimacy**

**Political Institutions**

**Legitimacy of  
Governmental Bodies**

Is the government dishonest?  
Does the government waste money?  
Should you trust the federal  
government?  
Does the government know what it is  
doing?  
Is the government run for only a select  
group of people?

**Legitimacy of  
Democratic Participation**

Do you plan to vote?  
Do you plan to write a politician?  
Do you plan to give money to a  
political campaign?  
Do you plan to participate in a  
demonstration?  
Do you plan to boycott a product?

**Economic Institutions**

**Legitimacy of Consumption**

People should be encouraged to buy goods.  
False advertising is okay.

**Legitimacy of Materialism**

The US is too much for profit.  
There is too much concern over money in  
society.  
There will be more economic shortages in the  
future.

**Note: Scales reflect recoding of variables so that the highest values reflect the strongest belief in the legitimacy of an institution and the lowest values reflect the weakest belief.**

**Figure 3.2: Delinquent Acts Used as Dependent Variables**

**Alcohol Use**

**Marijuana Use**

**"Hard" Drug Use**      LSD, Psychedelics, Cocaine (powder),  
Amphetamines, Barbiturates,  
Tranquilizers, Heroin, Other Narcotics,  
and Inhalants

**Property Offenses**

Stealing Something Valued under \$50  
Stealing Something Valued over \$50  
Auto Theft  
Shoplifting  
Stealing a Car Part(s)  
Trespassing  
Committing Arson  
Damaging School Property  
Damaging Work Property

**Violent Offenses**

Hitting a Supervisor at Work/School  
Hitting a Parent  
Fighting at Work/School  
Gang Fighting  
Hurting Someone Badly  
Threatening Someone with a Weapon



The first scale, perceived political legitimacy, was constructed by summing responses to questions about governmental honesty, waste, trustworthiness, knowledge, and elitism. This scale includes the following questions: (1) "Do you think some of the people running the government are crooked or dishonest? [and] (2) Do you think the government wastes much of the money we pay in taxes? [and] (3) How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right? [and] (4) Do you feel that the people running the government are smart people who usually know what they are doing? [and] (5) Would you say the government is pretty much run for a few big interests looking out for themselves, or is it run for the benefit of all the people?" Response categories for all questions in this scale fell along a five point Likert scale.

The other perceived-political legitimacy scale captures information about how important civic engagement is for the respondent. High school seniors were asked whether they will or have voted, wrote a politician, gave money to a politician, demonstrated, or boycotted a product. The questions asked of respondents included in this scale were: "[Have you ever done, or do you plan to do the following things?] (1) Vote in a public election? [and] (2) Write to public officials? [and]

(3) Give money to a political candidate or cause? [and] (4) Participate in a lawful demonstration? [and] (5) Boycott certain products or stores?" Response categories for all of the questions were: (1) Probably won't, (2) Don't know, (3) Probably will and (4) Have done.

Two perceived-economic legitimacy scales also were created to capture respondents' beliefs about consumption and materialism. High school seniors were asked about whether people should be encouraged to buy goods and whether it is okay to advertise consumer goods with false information. Specifically, respondents were asked, "How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (1) Since it helps the economy to grow, people should be encouraged to buy more. [and] (2) There is nothing wrong with advertising that gets people to buy things they don't really need." Response categories ranged from (1) Strongly disagree to (5) Strongly agree for both perceived-economic legitimacy scales.

The second perceived-economic legitimacy scale was constructed by summing responses to statements about materialism. A legitimacy of materialism scale was constructed from summing responses to statements about materialistic society. The students were asked to respond to statements regarding the U.S. being too focused on profits, money, and

future economic concerns. The specific questions were: "How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (1) In the United States, we put too much emphasis on making profits and not enough on human well-being. [and] (2) People are too much concerned with material things these days. [and] (3) There will probably be more shortages in the future, so Americans will have to learn how to be happy with fewer things."

To test each of the scales for internal validity and reliability, factor analyses and reliability tests were conducted for each scale for each year of data. The factor analyses and reliability tests for all of the years were combined. Factor loadings were estimated using principle component analysis, specifying a minimum Eigenvalue of one with Varimax rotation. For each of the independent variable scales the alpha, which measures internal consistency, exceeded .70. Factor weights were not assigned because the factor loadings fluctuate from year to year.

### **Dependent Variables**

*Monitoring the Future* contains numerous questions on delinquency and drug use that allows for a test of a

relationship among individuals between beliefs about social institutions and lawbreaking.

There are six dependent variables in this study; some are scales, and some are single-item variables. As shown in Figure 3.2, these are alcohol use, marijuana use, hard-drug use scale, property-crime scale, and violent-crime scale. *MTF* consistently measures the use of twelve drugs: tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, LSD, psychedelics, cocaine, amphetamines, barbiturates, tranquilizers, heroin, other narcotics, and inhalants. Survey questions are phrased, "On how many occasions (if any) have you used [drug] during the last 12 months?" Responses are coded, "(1) 0 Occasions, (2) 1 to 2 times, (3) 3 to 5 times, (4) 6 to 9 times, (5) 10 to 19 times, (6) 20 to 39 times, and (7) 40 or more occasions." Factor analyses showed that hard-drugs loaded on one factor; however, alcohol and marijuana loaded on separate factors. Accordingly, three separate drug variables were used in the analyses (See Figure 3.2).

*Monitoring the Future* measures delinquency through a series of questions about thirteen different types of offenses: stealing (valued under \$50), stealing (valued over \$50), auto theft, shoplifting, stealing car parts, trespassing, arson, damaging school property, damaging work

property, hitting a supervisor at work, hitting a parent, fighting at work or school, gang fighting, hurting someone else badly, and threatening someone w/ weapon. Survey questions are phrased, "During the last 12 months, how often have you [offense]?" Responses are coded (1) Not at all, (2) Once, (3) Twice, (4) 3 to 4 times, and (5) 5 or more times. Initial factor analyses showed that these delinquency variables loaded on one factor. However, in the current research, the thirteen delinquency survey items were also divided into two scaled variables: property-offenses and violent-offenses. The property-crimes scale includes theft, trespass, arson, and property damage. The violent-crime scale includes hitting, fighting, hurting and threatening (See Figure 3.2).

### **Control Variables**

Sex, race and class are specifically mentioned in both theories as variables that may influence the relationship between social institutional legitimacy and delinquency. In the current study, gender is coded 1=female, 0=male. Race is measured by the respondents' self assessment as white (coded 0) or non-white (coded 1). Parents' education level is measured by the highest level of education achieved by either parent of the respondent. This variable is coded from 1 (Grade school) to 6 (Graduate school).

### **Analytic Plan**

*Monitoring the Future* is a repeated survey, which is to say that the same questions are asked each year of a different group of respondents. Firebaugh (1997) suggests that there are several ways to examine repeated surveys. These methods include analyses of separate years in the dataset and cross-sectional pooled analyses. The current research uses two methods of analyses: (1) cross-sectional analyses among individuals for each year and (2) pooled analyses that combine individual-level data and data for each year. Both of these types of analyses are covered in the following two chapters.

**Chapter 4**  
**Cross-Sectional Data Analyses**

## **Chapter 4**

### **Cross-Sectional Data Analyses**

The first analytical method employed was a cross-sectional analysis that examined each year from 1976 through 2000 separately. Data were analyzed using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models. This chapter discusses the findings of these analyses.

Throughout this chapter, the level of significance and direction of the OLS coefficients are discussed as support for either institutional legitimacy or institutional anomie theories. If the relationship between the given social institution and type of delinquency/drug use is positive, this lends support to institutional anomie theory. Conversely, if the relationship between the social institution and the delinquent act/drug use is negative, this lends support to institutional legitimacy theory. Each type of delinquency is discussed separately to illustrate the differences among offenses.

According to both theories, the political, economic, and family institutions exert simultaneous effects on crime. Thus, all of my analyses are multivariate. I included all of the scaled independent variables.



After the initial regressions were performed for each of the dependent variables, all analyses were repeated controlling for race, gender, and parents' highest education level. These variables are specifically mentioned in both of the theories being tested, as they may mitigate the relationships between social institutional legitimacy and delinquency/drug use. The addition of these control variables did not change the direction of the coefficients or substantially alter the magnitude of the coefficients in any of the models.

Furthermore, the analyses included tests for interaction effects between the control variables and independent variable scales. Most of the coefficients in these models were not significant. None changed the directions of the coefficients.

### **Alcohol Use**

As noted in Chapter 3, alcohol use is measured by the question: "On how many occasions have you had alcoholic beverages to drink—more than just a few sips during the last 12 months?" Table 4.1 shows the OLS coefficients predicting self-reported alcohol use during the last year. Instead of showing the coefficients for every year separately, this table shows the coefficients from every sixth year: 1976, 1982,

1988, 1994, and 2000. While the purpose of this is efficiency in reading the table, the years shown are representative of the other years. Moreover, Table 4.2 summarizes the direction and significance of the coefficients for all of the years, 1976 through 2000.

The OLS coefficients on alcohol use show support for both institutional anomie and intuitionist legitimacy theories. There is also consistency across the years in the analysis of how beliefs about American social institutions impact alcohol use. To examine these findings further it is necessary to look at the independent-variable scales separately.

#### **Political Legitimacy**

As shown in Table 4.1, a strong belief in the legitimacy of the government is negatively correlated with alcohol use across the 25 years in the study. This negative relationship was significant during 19 of the 25 years (see Figure 4.2), which supports institutional anomie theory.

**Table 4.1: OLS Coefficients Predicting Alcohol Use from 1976-2000**

(Standardized coefficients are shown)

Independent Variables	1976	1982	1988	1994	2000
<b>Political Institutions</b>					
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies	-0.090 ***	-0.101 ***	-0.023	-0.025	-0.058 **
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	0.059 **	0.078 ***	-0.016	-0.036	-0.015
<b>Economic Institutions</b>					
Legitimacy of Materialism	0.046 **	0.053 **	0.049 **	0.750 **	0.065 **
Legitimacy of Consumption	-0.028	-0.021	-0.065 ***	-0.100 ***	-0.094 ***
<b>Family Institutions</b>					
Legitimacy of Family Structure	-0.112 ***	-0.106 ***	-0.109 ***	-0.133 ***	-0.146 ***
<b>Control Variables</b>					
Sex	-0.146 ***	-0.103 ***	-0.119 ***	-0.120 ***	-0.038
Race	-0.215 ***	-0.259 ***	-0.268 ***	-0.128 ***	-0.251 ***
Highest Education Level of Parents	0.017	0.063 ***	0.080 ***	0.013	0.024
R2	0.093	0.109	0.122	0.079	0.112
N	3353	3667	3356	2657	2212

\* p<.05      \*\*p<.01      \*\*\*p<.001 (two tailed tests)

However, the relationship between perceived political legitimacy and alcohol use becomes more ambiguous when examining the legitimacy of democratic participation. Democratic participation is significantly and positively correlated during only nine of the 25 year period covered in this study (1976 to 2000). This finding shows support for institutional anomie theory.

The relationships between perceived political legitimacy and alcohol show support for both institutional anomie and institutional legitimacy theories. The fairly consistent significant and negative correlation between perceived legitimacy of the governmental bodies and alcohol use lends support to institutional legitimacy theory. Yet the relationships between the perceived legitimacy of democratic participation and alcohol use show some support for institutional anomie theory, as well as for institutional legitimacy theory.

### **Economic Legitimacy**

Table 4.1 also shows the coefficients for perceived economic legitimacy and alcohol use. Again, there is support for both theories. The materialism scale is consistently positively correlated with alcohol use. This relationship is significant in 23 of the 25 years of the

study (see Table 4.2). Juveniles who worry that our society may be too focused on money and that the economy may have troubles tend to report higher alcohol use. This finding is consistent with institutional anomie theory.

Alternatively, the consumption scale tends to be negatively correlated with alcohol use (see Table 4.1), and this relationship is significant in 18 of the years of the study (see Table 4.2). Teens who believe in the legitimacy of consumption tend to report lower alcohol use. This finding supports institutional legitimacy theory.

#### **Familial Legitimacy**

Lastly, teens that report wanting to stay married if they marry also report lower levels of alcohol use. As shown in Table 4.2, in all 25 years of the study, the negative relationship between the legitimacy of the family structure and alcohol use is significant. As shown in Table 4.1 the magnitude of the coefficients for family and alcohol use are the largest among all social institutional legitimacy variables.

**Table 4.2 Summary of Direction and Significance of Coefficients for Alcohol Use  
from 1976-2000 (N=25)**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Positive Correlations</b>		<b>Negative Correlations</b>	
	Significant	Not Significant	Significant	Not Significant
<b>Political Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies			19	6
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	9	6	1	9
<b>Economic Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Materialism	23	2		
Legitimacy of Consumption		1	18	6
<b>Family Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Family Structure			25	
<b>Control Variables</b>				
Sex			24	1
Race			25	
Highest Education Level of Parents	15	8		2

(Note: Significance level is at the .10 level)

### **Control Variables**

The presence of the three control variables, sex, race, and parents' education level, does not significantly attenuate the relationship between the scales of perceptions of social institutions and delinquency/drug use. Sex and race both consistently exert negative and significant effects on alcohol use (see Table 4.1). Whites and boys are more likely to use alcohol in any given year than blacks and girls (see Table 4.2). Parents' education level tends to be positively related with alcohol use. Juveniles with parents with higher education levels tend to drink alcohol more than juveniles whose parents have lower education levels (see Table 4.1). This relationship is significant in 15 of the 25 years (see Table 4.2).

### **Marijuana Use**

High school seniors also were asked: "On how many occasions (if any) have you used marijuana or hashish during the last 12 months?" Table 4.3 shows the OLS coefficients predicting self-reported alcohol use during the last year for 1976, 1982, 1988, 1994, and 2000. Table 4.4 summarizes the direction and significance of the coefficients for all of the years, 1976 through 2000. The

**Table 4.3: OLS Coefficients Predicting Marijuana Use from 1976-2000**

(Standardized coefficients are shown)

Independent Variables	1976		1982		1988		1994		2000	
<b>Political Institutions</b>										
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies	-0.118	***	-0.110	***	-0.025		-0.017		-0.053	**
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	0.066	**	0.037	*	-0.053	**	-0.022		-0.004	
<b>Economic Institutions</b>										
Legitimacy of Materialism	0.011		0.024		-0.010		0.006		0.029	
Legitimacy of Consumption	0.022		-0.008		-0.059	**	-0.038		-0.038	
<b>Family Institutions</b>										
Legitimacy of Family Structure	-0.150	***	-0.159	***	-0.180	***	-0.166	***	-0.183	***
<b>Control Variables</b>										
Sex	-0.129	***	-0.079	***	-0.081	***	-0.089	***	-0.058	**
Race	-0.068	**	-0.092	***	-0.134	***	-0.045	*	-0.111	***
Highest Education Level of Parents	0.010		0.039	**	0.012		0.023		0.035	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.058		0.053		0.063		0.044		0.061	
N	3353		3667		3356		2657		2212	

\* p&lt;.05      \*\*p&lt;.01      \*\*\*p&lt;.001 (two tailed tests)

Note: This model controls for years 1976-2000.



number of significant coefficients is considerably less than for alcohol use especially the positive ones. However, the relationships between perceived institutional legitimacy and marijuana use are similar to those for alcohol use.

### **Political Legitimacy**

As shown in Table 4.3, a strong belief in the legitimacy of the government is negatively correlated with alcohol use across the 25 years in the study (see Table 4.4). This negative relationship was significant during 23 of the 25 years. As was the case with alcohol use, the relationship is less consistent between the perceived legitimacy of democratic participation and marijuana use. Democratic participation is significantly and positively correlated with marijuana use during only seven years (see Table 4.4). The bulk of the correlations (17) are not significant.

The relationships between perceived political legitimacy and marijuana use show support for both institutional anomie and institutional legitimacy theories. The significant negative correlation between perceived legitimacy of governmental bodies and marijuana use support institutional legitimacy theory. However, the

relationships between the perceived legitimacy of democratic participation and marijuana use provide limited support for institutional anomie theory.

### **Economic Legitimacy**

Table 4.3 shows little support for either theory when examining the relationships between perceived economic legitimacy and marijuana use. The materialism scale is not significantly related to marijuana use either positively or negatively in 24 of the 25 years. Similarly, the consumption scale is not related to marijuana use in 17 of the years in this study (see Table 4.4).

### **Familial Legitimacy**

Although the perceived legitimacy of economic institutions has virtually no impact on marijuana use, perceptions of the legitimacy of family structure do. Juveniles who report wanting to stay married if they marry tend to report lower levels of marijuana use. As shown in Table 4.3 the magnitude of the coefficients for family and marijuana use are the largest of all social institutional relationships.

**Table 4.4 Summary of Direction and Significance of Coefficients for Marijuana Use  
from 1976-2000 (N=25)**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Positive Correlations</b>		<b>Negative Correlations</b>	
	Significant	Not Significant	Significant	Not Significant
<b>Political Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies			23	2
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	7	5	1	12
<b>Economic Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Materialism	1	13		11
Legitimacy of Consumption	1	2	7	15
<b>Family Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Family Structure			25	
<b>Control Variables</b>				
Sex			25	
Race			25	
Highest Education Level of Parents	2	19		4

(Note: Significance level is at the .10 level)

Further, Table 4.4 shows that in all 25 years of the study, the negative relationship between the perceived legitimacy of the family structure and alcohol use is significant. This finding is consistent with the relationship between the perceived legitimacy of family structure and alcohol use that was discussed earlier. Moreover, this finding shows strong support for institutional legitimacy theory.

### **Control Variables**

The relationship between the perceived institutional legitimacy and marijuana use remains significant with the addition of the three control variables. Whites and boys are more likely to use marijuana than girls and blacks. This relationship is significant in all 25 years of the study (see Table 4.4). Parents education level has a positive relationship with marijuana use; however, this relationship is only significant in two of the 25 years (see Table 4.4).

### **Hard Drug Use**

In a series of questions, high school seniors were asked: "On how many occasions (if any) have you used [drug] during the last 12 months?" Respondents were asked about their use of LSD, psychedelics, cocaine (powder),

amphetamines, barbiturates, tranquilizers, heroin, other narcotics, and inhalants. Table 4.5 shows the OLS coefficients predicting self-reported hard drug use during the last year for 1976, 1982, 1988, 1994, and 2000. Table 4.6 summarizes the direction and significance of the coefficients for all of the years, 1976 through 2000 for hard drug use. The number of significant coefficients is more than for marijuana use and about the same as for alcohol use.

**Table 4.5: OLS Coefficients Predicting Hard Drug Use from 1976-2000**  
(Standardized coefficients are shown)

Independent Variables	1976		1982		1988		1994		2000	
<b>Political Institutions</b>										
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies	-0.096	***	-0.135	***	-0.067	**	-0.088	***	-0.101	***
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	0.056	**	0.067	***	-0.021		0.046	**	0.020	
<b>Economic Institutions</b>										
Legitimacy of Materialism	-0.004		0.037	*	-0.023		-0.038		0.024	
Legitimacy of Consumption	-0.046	*	0.033	*	-0.046	**	-0.013		0.012	***
<b>Family Institutions</b>										
Legitimacy of Family Structure	-0.126	***	-0.160	***	-0.149	***	-0.125	***	-0.120	***
<b>Control Variables</b>										
Sex	-0.013		-0.026		-0.063	**	-0.062	**	-0.065	**
Race	0.092	***	-0.141	***	-0.087	***	-0.092	***	-0.134	***
Highest Education Level of Parents	-0.011		0.017		0.027		-0.034		-0.029	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.033		0.063		0.039		0.037		0.047	
N	3353		3667		3356		2657		2212	

\* p<.05      \*\*p<.01      \*\*\*p<.001 (two tailed tests)

Note: This model controls for years 1976-2000.

### **Political Legitimacy**

Consistent with the findings for the other two types of substance use, Tables 4.5 and 4.6 show that a strong belief in the legitimacy of the government is negatively correlated with hard drug use across the 25 years in the study. Also similar to the previously mentioned findings, the relationship between the perceived legitimacy of democratic participation and hard drug use is less consistent. Democratic participation is positively correlated with drug use during 22 years, but that relationship is only significant in 11 of the years. Over half of all the correlations (14) are not significant.

### **Economic Legitimacy**

The relationships between economic legitimacy and hard drug use also are shown in Table 4.6. The materialism scale is positively correlated with hard drug use in 15 years, but only significantly in five. Nine of the ten remaining years are negatively and not significantly related to hard drug use. These findings support institutional anomie theory. However, the legitimacy of

**Table 4.6 Summary of Direction and Significance of Coefficients for Hard Drug Use  
from 1976-2000 (N=25)**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Positive Correlations</b>		<b>Negative Correlations</b>	
	Significant	Not Significant	Significant	Not Significant
<b>Political Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies			25	
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	11	11		3
<b>Economic Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Materialism	5	10	1	9
Legitimacy of Consumption	3	5	8	9
<b>Family Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Family Structure			25	
<b>Control Variables</b>				
Sex		1	21	3
Race			25	
Highest Education Level of Parents	1	10	2	12

(Note: Significance level is at the .10 level)



the consumption scale has a different relationship with hard drug use. It is not significant in 14 of the years of this study. In eight of the years, consumption is negatively and significantly related to hard drug use. This provides limited support for institutional legitimacy theory.

### **Familial Legitimacy**

As with alcohol and marijuana use, perceptions of family legitimacy has the most consistent correlation with hard drug use. Juveniles who report wanting to stay married if they marry tend to report lower levels of hard drug use. As shown in Table 4.5 the magnitude of the coefficients for family and hard drug use are the largest of all social institutional relationships. Also, for all 25 years of the study, the negative relationship between the perceived legitimacy of the family structure and hard drug use is significant (See Table 4.6). This finding contributes more support for institutional legitimacy theory.

### **Control Variables**

The association between the beliefs in institutional legitimacy and hard drug use remains significant with the addition of the three control variables. Boys and whites

tend to have a higher likelihood of using hard drugs throughout most of the 25 years (see Table 4.6). However, parents' education level is not significantly related to hard drug use in 22 of the 25 years (see Table 4.6).

### **Property Offenses**

The findings in this chapter thus far have discussed illegal drug use by juveniles. Now, the discussion turns to property offenses and violent offenses. In regard to property crimes, respondents were asked about the frequency they committed the following acts: stealing something valued under fifty dollars, stealing something valued over fifty dollars, auto theft, shoplifting, stealing a car part(s), trespassing, committing arson, damaging school property, and damaging work property.

Table 4.7 shows the OLS coefficients for self-reported property offenses during the last 12 months for 1976, 1982, 1988, 1994, and 2000. Table 4.8 summarizes the direction and significance of the coefficients for all of the years, 1976 through 2000. The relationships between American social institutional legitimacy and property offenses are consistent with the relationships discussed regarding illegal drug use. However, there are some noteworthy

patterns that do appear stronger for property offenses than the other types of delinquency.

### **Political Legitimacy**

Table 4.7 shows that the coefficients for a strong belief in the legitimacy of the government are negatively related with property offenses across the 25 years in the study. A new pattern is apparent, however. The magnitude of the coefficients for the perceived legitimacy of governmental bodies are often higher than those for family legitimacy. This strong negative relationship is significant during all 25 years of this study (See Table 4.8). The relationship between the perceived legitimacy of democratic participation and property offenses is less consistent than the other political scale. Democratic participation is positively correlated with property offenses during 17 years, yet that relationship is only significant in four of the years. In all, 21 of the coefficients are not significant.

**Table 4.7: OLS Coefficients Predicting Property Offenses from 1976-2000**  
(Standardized coefficients are shown)

Independent Variables	1976		1982		1988		1994		2000	
<b>Political Institutions</b>										
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies	-0.160	***	-0.135	***	-0.082	***	-0.086	***	-0.131	***
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	0.012		0.021		-0.026		0.042	*	0.033	
<b>Economic Institutions</b>										
Legitimacy of Materialism	0.043	*	0.020		0.014		-0.004		0.055	**
Legitimacy of Consumption	-0.033		0.005		-0.079	***	-0.051	**	-0.890	***
<b>Family Institutions</b>										
Legitimacy of Family Structure	-0.125	***	-0.117	***	-0.146	***	-0.164	***	-0.126	***
<b>Control Variables</b>										
Sex	-0.240	***	-0.217	***	-0.208	***	-0.237	***	-0.174	***
Race	-0.035		-0.059	**	-0.070	***	0.066	**	-0.015	
Highest Education Level of Parents	-0.022		0.046	**	0.030		-0.007		-0.007	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.106		0.085		0.089		0.112		0.089	
N	3353		3667		3356		2657		2212	

\* p<.05      \*\*p<.01      \*\*\*p<.001 (two tailed tests)

Note: This model controls for years 1976-2000.

The relationships between political legitimacy and property offenses show more support for institutional legitimacy theory as shown by the significant and negative correlation between perceived legitimacy of governmental bodies and property offending.

### **Economic Legitimacy**

The relationships between perceived economic legitimacy and property crimes are also shown in Tables 4.7 and 4.8. As with the previously discussed delinquent acts, support for either theory is mixed on the perceived legitimacy of economic institutions and property offenses. The materialism scale is positively correlated with property offenses in 23 years, but only significantly in eleven. The consumption scale is negatively related to property offenses in 23 of the years of this study; however only during 14 of these years are those relationships significant.

### **Familial Legitimacy**

Again, juveniles who want to stay married if they marry tend to report lower frequencies of property offenses. Table 4.7 shows the magnitude of the coefficients for family and property offenses. While these coefficients are large compared to most of the other social

**Table 4.8 Summary of Direction and Significance of Coefficients for Property Offenses  
from 1976-2000 (N=25)**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Positive Correlations</b>		<b>Negative Correlations</b>	
	Significant	Not Significant	Significant	Not Significant
<b>Political Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies			25	
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	4	13		8
<b>Economic Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Materialism	11	12		2
Legitimacy of Consumption		2	14	9
<b>Family Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Family Structure			25	
<b>Control Variables</b>				
Sex			25	
Race	2	2	15	6
Highest Education Level of Parents	3	13		9

(Note: Significance level is at the .10 level)

institution variables, the perceived legitimacy of governmental bodies is often higher throughout the 25-year period of the study. Once again, during all twenty-five years of the study, the negative relationship between the perceived legitimacy of the family structure and property offenses is significant, bolstering support for institutional legitimacy theory (see Table 4.8).

### **Control Variables**

The relationship between the perceptions of institutional legitimacy and property offenses remains significant despite the introduction of sex, race, and parents' education level. Boys have a higher likelihood of committing a property offense than girls in all 25 years of the study (see Table 4.8). However, the relationship between race and property offending is less stable. Whites have higher rates of self-reporting committing a property crime in most years, but that relationship is only significant in 15 of the 25 years (see Table 4.8). Parents' educational attainment is not significant in 22 of the years in this study.

### **Violent Offenses**

The final category of delinquent offenses is violent offenses. High school seniors were asked a series of questions about the frequency of committing several violent acts including: hitting a supervisor at work or school, hitting a parent, fighting at work or school, gang fighting, hurting someone badly, and threatening someone with a weapon.

Table 4.9 shows the OLS coefficients for self-reported property offenses during the last 12 months for 1976, 1982, 1988, 1994, and 2000. Table 4.10 summarizes the direction and significance of the coefficients for all of the years, 1976 through 2000. As shown in Table 4.9 and 4.10, the OLS coefficients for self-reported violent offenses during the last 12 months are similar to the results for property offenses.

### **Political Legitimacy**

As Table 4.9 shows, the coefficients for a strong belief in the legitimacy of the government are negatively related with property offenses across the 25 years in the study. Like the relationships found with property offenses, the magnitude of the coefficients for the perceived legitimacy in governmental bodies are often



higher than those for family legitimacy. This strong negative relationship is significant during all 25 years of this study (See Table 4.10).

The relationship between the perceived legitimacy of democratic participation and violent offenses is also fairly consistent and strong. Democratic participation is positively correlated with violent offenses during all 25 years, and these relationships are significant in 19 of the years. Of all the types of delinquency reviewed thus far, this is the strongest relationship with the perceived legitimacy of democratic participation.

The findings on violent offenses are significant tests of institutional anomie and institutional legitimacy theories. Both of these theories contend that social institutions should exert the strongest effects on the most serious, namely violent, crimes.

**Table 4.9: OLS Coefficients Predicting Violent Offenses from 1976-2000**

(Standardized coefficients are shown)

Independent Variables			1976		1982		1988		1994		2000	
<b>Political Institutions</b>												
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies			-0.015	***	-0.155	***	-0.150	***	-0.091	***	-0.152	***
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation			0.021		0.053	**	0.045	**	0.034		0.058	**
<b>Economic Institutions</b>												
Legitimacy of Materialism			0.074	***	0.016		0.013		-0.006		0.023	
Legitimacy of Consumption			-0.029		-0.028		-0.051	**	-0.019		-0.066	**
<b>Family Institutions</b>												
Legitimacy of Family Structure			-0.082	***	-0.087	***	-0.081	***	-0.133	***	-0.090	***
<b>Control Variables</b>												
Sex			-0.051	**	-0.057	**	-0.094	***	-0.114	***	-0.061	**
Race			-0.132	***	-0.164	***	-0.128	***	-0.007		-0.143	***
Highest Education Level of Parents			-0.015		0.039		0.032		-0.018		0.019	
R <sup>2</sup>			0.050		0.056		0.051		0.044		0.061	
N			3353		3667		3356		2657		2212	

\* p&lt;.05    \*\*p&lt;.01    \*\*\*p&lt;.001 (two tailed tests)

Note: This model controls for years 1976-2000.

### **Economic Legitimacy**

The relationships between perceived economic legitimacy and violent offenses also are shown in Tables 4.9 and 4.10. Once again, support for both theories is mixed. The materialism scale is positively correlated with violent offenses in 24 years and significantly during 13 of those years. Consumption is negatively related to violent offenses in twenty-four of the years of this study. However, only during eight of these years are those relationships significant.

### **Familial Legitimacy**

As noted throughout this chapter, juveniles who want to stay married if they marry tend to report lower frequencies of delinquency. This remains the pattern for violent offenses. Table 4.9 shows the magnitude of the coefficients for family and violent offenses. Similar to the findings on property offenses, the coefficients for violent offenses are large compared to most of the other social institution variables. However, the magnitude of the coefficients for the perceived legitimacy of governmental bodies is also very high for violent offenses. This finding, when combined with the others discussed,

**Table 4.10 Summary of Direction and Significance of Coefficients for Violent Offenses  
from 1976-2000 (N=25)**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Positive Correlations</b>		<b>Negative Correlations</b>	
	Significant	Not Significant	Significant	Not Significant
<b>Political Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies			25	
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	19	6		
<b>Economic Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Materialism	13	11		1
Legitimacy of Consumption		1	8	16
<b>Family Institutions</b>				
Legitimacy of Family Structure			25	
<b>Control Variables</b>				
Sex			25	
Race			24	1
Highest Education Level of Parents	2	9	2	12

(Note: Significance level is at the .10 level)

shows strong support for institutional legitimacy theory (See Table 4.10).

### **Control Variables**

The association between the belief in institutional legitimacy and violent offenses is not diminished by the presence of the three control variables. Sex and race have the most consistently significant relationships with violent offending. Boys and whites are much more likely to self-report committing a violent offense than girls and blacks (see Table 4.9). Parents' education level is not significant in 21 of 25 years (see Table 4.10).

### **All Types of Delinquency**

This chapter has thus far addressed each of the five types of offenses separately. However, important patterns are noticeable. All of the different social institutions examined tend to have fairly stable relationships with delinquency. Table 4.11 summarizes the correlations between perceptions of American social institutions and all types of delinquency. Of the institutions tested, the family structure variable has the most consistent relationship with delinquency: significant and negative coefficients across all types of delinquency and all years.

The perceived legitimacy of governmental bodies has the next most consistent relationship: 117 of 125 coefficients are significant and negative. However, the coefficients are less regular across the other institutional variables.

Across all types of delinquency, the magnitude, direction of the sign of the coefficient, and the significance levels across all 25 years of data tend to favor institutional legitimacy theory. There are three times as many significant negative correlations as there are significant positive correlations between the perceived legitimacy of social institutions and delinquency/drug use (see Table 4.11). This evidence supports LaFree's (1998) institutional legitimacy theory on average more than Messner and Rosenfeld's (2001) institutional anomie theory. Moreover, the patterns that emerge within each of the five different types of delinquency indicate a patterned relationship between those institutions and delinquency generally. The next chapter will focus on pooling the data from each of the years to examine how the findings may change.

**Table 4.11 Summary of Direction and Significance of Coefficients for All Delinquent Acts  
from 1976-2000 (N=125)**

Independent Variables	Positive Correlations		Negative Correlations	
	Significant	Not Significant	Significant	Not Significant
Political Institutions				
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies			117	8
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	50	41	2	32
Economic Institutions				
Legitimacy of Materialism	53	48	1	23
Legitimacy of Consumption	4	11	55	55
Family Institutions				
Legitimacy of Family Structure			125	
	Total=107		Total=300	
Control Variables				
Sex			120	5
Race	2	2	114	7
Highest Education Level of Parents	23	59	4	39

(Note: Significance level is at the .10 level.

N=125 Represents all types of delinquency combined.)

## Chapter 5

### Cross-Sectional Pooled Analyses



## Chapter 5

### Cross-Sectional Pooled Analyses

The second analytical method employed was a pooled cross-sectional analysis that combines individual-level data and data for each year. The analyses presented in this chapter are intended to summarize the relationships between perceptions of American social institutions and offending in a more concise format. Chapter 4 explored the subtleties in these relationships across all 25 years of the study separately. This chapter focuses on analyzing summary patterns while controlling for the influence of year through dummy variables. Data from 1976 through 2000 were combined, or pooled, into one dataset. This method has been employed in previous studies of repeated surveys such as *Monitoring the Future*. After the data were pooled, two key types of analyses were performed: OLS regressions and logistic regression models.

#### Ordinary Least-Squares Regressions

Just as in the non-pooled analyses discussed in Chapter 4, I used OLS regression techniques to look for changing effects of the social institutions in the pooled

analyses. The main model presented includes all of the independent variables.

Table 5.1 summarizes the OLS regression estimates for five types of offenses. Several findings merit discussion.

The magnitude, significance and direction of the signs of the coefficients support both institutional legitimacy theory and institutional anomie theory. Each separate set of variables merits its own discussion.

### **Political Legitimacy**

The findings lend support to the idea that juveniles' perceptions of political institutional legitimacy are correlated with delinquency and drug use. Strong beliefs in the ability of the federal government to do a good job and act in the interest of the majority are related to less delinquency and substance use. This finding lends support to institutional legitimacy theory.

However, high school seniors who anticipate higher levels of participation in civic behaviors, such as voting, demonstrating, and writing politicians, tend to be related to higher levels of self-reported delinquency. This finding supports institutional anomie theory

**Table 5.1: OLS Coefficients Predicting Five Types of Delinquency**

(Standardized coefficients are shown)

Independent Variables	Alcohol	Marijuana	Hard Drugs	Property Offenses	Violent Offenses
<b>Political Institutions</b>					
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies	-0.063 ***	-0.073 ***	-0.101 ***	-0.123 ***	-0.153 ***
Legitimacy of Democratic Participation	0.021 ***	0.100 **	0.033 ***	0.022 ***	0.055 ***
<b>Economic Institutions</b>					
Legitimacy of Materialism	0.061 ***	0.008 *	0.007	0.035 ***	0.041 ***
Legitimacy of Consumption	-0.047 ***	-0.022 ***	-0.015 ***	-0.039 ***	-0.031 ***
<b>Family Institutions</b>					
Legitimacy of Family Structure	-0.132 ***	-0.166 ***	-0.136 ***	-0.125 ***	-0.090 ***
<b>Control Variables</b>					
Sex	-0.108 ***	-0.089 ***	-0.043 ***	-0.222 ***	-0.082 ***
Race	-0.220 ***	-0.088 ***	-0.117 ***	-0.041 ***	-0.131 ***
Highest Education Level of Parents	0.039 ***	0.018	-0.001	0.015 ***	0.001
R <sup>2</sup>	0.135	0.086	0.048	0.093	0.059
N=75929					

\* p&lt;.05      \*\*p&lt;.01      \*\*\*p&lt;.001 (two tailed tests)

Note: This model controls for years 1976-2000.

### **Economic Legitimacy**

Juveniles who believe that consumption is legitimate tend to report less delinquency than juveniles who believe consumption is illegitimate. This finding is consistent with institutional legitimacy theory. However, those who worry that our society maybe too focused on money and that the economy may have troubles tend to report more delinquency. This finding is consistent with institutional anomie theory.

### **Familial Legitimacy**

Lastly, juveniles who report wanting to stay married if they marry also report relatively low levels of delinquency. These are consistently the strongest of effects, which supports institutional legitimacy theory. According to institutional legitimacy theory, the family is the most important of all social institutions as it typically has "control over individuals earliest, longest, and most intensively," (LaFree, 1998:135). The family should also be the most influential of the social institutions, influencing the attitudes about political and economic legitimacy (LaFree, 1998).

### **Controls and Interaction Effects**

After the initial regressions were performed, all analyses were repeated controlling for race, sex, and parents highest education level. These variables are specifically mentioned in both of the theories being tested, as they may moderate the relationships between social institutional legitimacy and delinquency and drug use.

Race and sex are highly correlated with all types of delinquency. In most models, parents' highest education level is not significantly correlated with delinquency.

I also tested for interaction effects between the control variables and the other independent variables. Most of the coefficients in these models were not significant, and none changed the direction of the coefficients.

### **Summary of OLS Findings**

The findings support both institutional anomie and institutional legitimacy theories on a cross-sectional level. There are effects of perceptions of family, economic and political institutional attitudes on delinquency and drug use, and these effects do not vary by type of offense.

The magnitude of the coefficients for perceptions of the legitimacy of governmental bodies tends to exceed the magnitude of the coefficients for democratic participation, which favors institutional legitimacy theory. However, the differences between the coefficients are very small. For example, for the two scaled variables measuring political legitimacy, the magnitude of the coefficients for perceptions of the legitimacy of governmental bodies tends to exceed the magnitude of the coefficients for democratic participation; thus there is more support for institutional legitimacy theory. Likewise, a comparison of the two scales of perceptions of economic legitimacy reveal the same pattern. Again, the magnitudes of the coefficients for consumption generally are higher than for materialism, which again favors institutional legitimacy.

So while I cannot say that there is conclusive evidence that institutional legitimacy theory is valid and institutional anomie theory is invalid, the cross-sectional individual-level analyses do tend to favor LaFree's institutional legitimacy theory.

### **Logistic Regressions**

As shown in the OLS findings, there are significant relationships between perceptions of American social institutions and self-reported delinquency and drug use. However, the OLS findings do not provide information about whether strong beliefs in American social institutions impact ever committing a delinquent act, but rather provide information about the frequency of delinquency. Logistic regressions were performed to test if the introduction of the social institutional variables increased or decreased the odds of ever committing delinquency or drug use.

Logit models estimate the effects of a set of predictor variables, in this case, on the probability of delinquency/drug use occurring. These models are interpreted as the change in the odds associated with a one-unit change in the independent variable. In other words, as the odds ratio associated with an independent variable increases, so does the likelihood of an offense (Deibert, 2000). The odds ratio refers to the ratio between the probability of committing a delinquent act (scoring '1' on the dependent variable) and the probability of not committing a delinquent act (scoring a '0' on dependent variable). When the probability of committing a

delinquent act is greater than the probability of not committing a delinquent act, the odds ratio will be higher than 1. When the probability of not committing a delinquent act exceeds the probability of committing a delinquent act, the odds ratio will be less than 1. An odds ratio of 1 signifies that the probabilities of committing compared with not committing a delinquent act are equal (See Powers and Xie, 2000).

Similar to the OLS results, the findings from the logistic regressions are consistent across all five types of delinquency. As shown in Table 5.2 through 5.6, the odds of ever committing one of the five types of delinquent acts during the past 12 months are only marginally higher if the respondent has a strong belief in democratic participation and the legitimacy of materialism. However, the odds of ever drinking during the past 12 months are slightly less for high school seniors with a strong belief in the legitimacy of governmental bodies and consumption. The family structure variable appears to have the strongest net effects on delinquency. Seniors who have strong faith in the legitimacy of the family structure are less likely to ever commit any of the five types of offenses. These findings are consistent with the cross-sectional analyses



discussed in Chapter 4 and again show support for both of the theories.

**Table 5.2: Logistic Model of Alcohol Use**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Wald</b>		<b>Exp (b)</b>
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies	-0.0314	0.00437	51.4135	***	0.96913
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	0.01919	0.00429	20.0465	***	1.01938
Legitimacy of Materialism	0.05483	0.00593	85.3761	***	1.05636
Legitimacy of Consumption	-0.0421	0.00684	37.8942	***	0.95875
Legitimacy of Family Structure	-0.3964	0.01778	497.245	***	0.67272
Sex	0.00039	0.02578	0.00023	***	1.00039
Race	-1.1034	0.0327	1138.68		0.33174
Highest Education Level of Parents	0.046	0.01051	19.1554	***	1.04707
Constant	4.22127	0.76955	30.0897	***	68.1196

---

Note: This model controls for years 1976-2000.

-2 Log Likelihood= 41734.99827

Model Chi-Square= 3041.206721

N= 75929

df= 33

**Table 5.3: Logistic Model of Marijuana Use**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Wald</b>		<b>Exp (b)</b>
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies	-0.0383	0.00319	144.248	***	0.96244
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	0.01134	0.00312	13.259	***	1.01141
Legitimacy of Materialism	0.01473	0.00415	12.5978	***	1.01484
Legitimacy of Consumption	-0.0257	0.005	26.4766	***	0.97459
Legitimacy of Family Structure	-0.3865	0.01118	1195.05	***	0.67946
Sex	-0.2431	0.01889	165.604	***	0.78419
Race	-0.5986	0.02982	403.06	***	0.54956
Highest Education Level of Parents	0.03745	0.00763	24.0987	***	1.03816
Constant	2.63193	0.46446	32.1116	***	13.9006

---

Note: This model controls for years 1976-2000.

-2 Log Likelihood= 67692.77504

Model Chi-Square= 3618.878015

N= 75929

df= 33

**Table 5.4: Logistic Model of Hard Drug Use**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Wald</b>		<b>Exp (b)</b>
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies	-0.06	0.00355	285.863	***	0.94175
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	0.02569	0.00347	54.9074	***	1.02602
Legitimacy of Materialism	0.00361	0.00463	0.6085		1.00362
Legitimacy of Consumption	-0.0255	0.00561	20.6544	***	0.97481
Legitimacy of Family Structure	-0.3712	0.0118	990.22	***	0.68993
Sex	-0.0616	0.02118	8.46443	**	0.94023
Race	-1.2631	0.04097	950.683	***	0.28276
Highest Education Level of Parents	0.00518	0.00853	0.36877		1.0052
Constant	1.57258	0.53583	8.61335	***	4.81906

---

Note: This model controls for years 1976-2000.

-2 Log Likelihood= 56975.81812

Model Chi-Square= 2809.700878

N= 75929

df= 33

**Table 5.5: Logistic Model of Property Offenses**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Wald</b>		<b>Exp (b)</b>
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies	-0.0485	0.00315	237.664	***	0.95262
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	0.02198	0.00307	51.3639	***	1.02222
Legitimacy of Materialism	0.01041	0.0041	6.4274	***	1.01046
Legitimacy of Consumption	-0.0341	0.00491	48.2707	***	0.96644
Legitimacy of Family Structure	-0.2775	0.01131	601.856	***	0.75768
Sex	-0.7692	0.01853	1723.29	***	0.46337
Race	-0.2728	0.02747	98.6193		0.76126
Highest Education Level of Parents	0.03613	0.00749	23.2557	***	1.03679
Constant	3.78301	0.48235	61.51	***	43.9479

---

Note: This model controls for years 1976-2000.

-2 Log Likelihood= 69548.64915

Model Chi-Square= 3263.409687

N= 75929

df= 33

**Table 5.6: Logistic Model of Violent Offenses**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Wald</b>		<b>Exp (b)</b>
Legitimacy of Governmental Bodies	-0.0534	0.00582	84.3143	***	0.94796
Legitimacy of Dem. Participation	0.05103	0.00583	76.6647	***	1.05236
Legitimacy of Materialism	0.0122	0.00753	2.62759	*	1.01227
Legitimacy of Consumption	-0.0217	0.00881	6.07203	**	0.97853
Legitimacy of Family Structure	-0.1551	0.02074	55.9035	***	0.85637
Sex	0.52115	0.03475	224.923	***	1.68397
Race	-1.5987	0.03774	1794.08		0.20216
Highest Education Level of Parents	0.09695	0.01376	49.6273	***	1.10181
Constant	2.37761	0.79489	8.94681	**	10.7791

---

Note: This model controls for years 1976-2000.

-2 Log Likelihood= 26749.30506

Model Chi-Square= 2185.393414

N= 75929

df= 33

### **Summary of Pooled Analyses**

The OLS and logistic regressions show similar results for the pooled cross-sectional analyses. Perceptions of the family structure are consistently the strongest predictors of delinquency and drug use. However, the findings for perceived political and economic legitimacy are mixed. In both types of analysis conducted, the perceived legitimacy of governmental bodies and the legitimacy of consumption are negatively correlated with delinquency. These findings support LaFree's (1998) institutional legitimacy theory. Yet, the legitimacy of democratic participation and materialism are positively correlated with delinquency. These findings lend support to Messner and Rosenfeld's (2001) institutional anomie.

**Chapter 6**  
**Discussion and Conclusion**



## **Chapter 6**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This research began with the question: how does delinquency fit within the American institutional structure and what theoretical frameworks shed light on it? To address this question, I tested two theories that focus on American institutional explanations of crime. While both of these theories originally were stated as explanations of serious offenses using national crime rates, this research extended the theories to include juvenile delinquency, using both individuals and years as units of analysis.

Although there is some support for both theories, institutional legitimacy theory tends to have more overall support than institutional anomie theory. This final chapter will summarize the major findings and comment on the future of this line of research.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

Several key findings are noteworthy. Most important, there is some evidence that the way American society is structured politically, economically, and familial has an impact crime. High school seniors' beliefs and perceptions

of institutional legitimacy are correlated with delinquency and drug use.

Although there is some support for both theories that were tested, the magnitude of the coefficients and the number of significant relationships over 25 years of data favor institutional legitimacy theory. Strong beliefs in the legitimacy of a social institution (family, political system, and economic system) are associated with less delinquency. Furthermore, the strongest correlations found in this study support institutional legitimacy theory. Of the three types of perceived legitimacy tested, juveniles' beliefs about the family structure were consistently the strongest predictors of delinquency and drug use.

However, the findings do not invalidate institutional anomie theory. Is it possible to reconcile how one type of political legitimacy may impact delinquency differently than another? Likewise, how is it possible to reconcile how the two types of economic legitimacy yield different effects on delinquency?

There are no clear answers to these two questions. This research shows that the nuances of different political and economic social institutions should be analyzed carefully in future studies. Previous tests of

institutional anomie and institutional legitimacy theories have not considered how different types of political legitimacy impact offending differently. Chamlin and Cochran (1995) pointed out that measurement of the independent variables in tests of institutional anomie theory is more complicated than the originators of the theory articulated. The current findings support Chamlin and Cochran's (1995) assessment.

The perceived legitimacy of political bodies and the perceived legitimacy of democratic participation are associated with delinquency and drug use differently. Likewise, the perceived legitimacy of consumption and the perceived legitimacy of materialism are related to offending in opposite directions. Thus there is not a universal influence of perceptions of American social institutions on all types of offending. Rather, there is variation in the associations between perceptions of American political and economic institutions on delinquency.

Despite the mixed support for institutional anomie and institutional legitimacy theories, this research shows that juveniles' behaviors can be situated in the context of their perceptions of American social institutions. The

family, the political institutions, and the economic institutions that dominate American social life do impact delinquency and drug use.

### **Future Directions**

Tests of American institutional explanations of crime have been limited thus far to aggregate datasets examining crime rates. However, this research has tested these macro sociological theories using individuals as the units of analysis. Institutional anomie and institutional legitimacy theories can be tested and useful in partially explaining individual-level behaviors. Future research can continue to expand the scope and range of existing institutional theories of crime. Two other considerations merit further attention in future research: the issue of measurement of social institutions and time-series analyses.

### **Measurement of Social Institutions**

As noted earlier, how to measure the social institutions in the tests of both theories has been a concern in previous research. However, because the current study focuses on adolescents, measurement issues may be even more important to consider in future research. For

instance, juveniles may have developmentally specific understandings of the salience of social institutions. Future research should also test if the beliefs in different social institutions is conditional. The current research used additive scales, however, other methods of measuring the perception of social institutions may show the relationships between the independent variables are more complex than discussed here.

### **Time Series Analyses**

Both theories have strong predictions about the relationship between social institutions and crime over time. A central component of institutional legitimacy theory is that historical changes matter in shaping perceptions of social institutional. Institutional anomie theory maintains that the influence of American social institutions is constant; that is, it does not vary by historical period. However, the findings in the current research do not involve time series analyses. I did experiment with this method in my initial analyses. Of the limited analysis conducted, none of the results reached levels of statistical significance. A key problem was autocorrelation and could not be eliminated through traditional procedures, such as first or second

differences. This suggests that these data are not conducive to time-series analyses. Future research should address changes in perceptions of institutional legitimacy and delinquency/drug use using different data.

## **Appendices**

## Appendix I

### Survey Questions from the *Monitoring the Future* Survey Instrument Form 2

V2105: #X ALC/ANN SIPS

On how many occasions have you had alcoholic beverages to drink—more than just a few sips during the last 12 months?

- 1 0 Occasions
- 2 1-2x
- 3 3-5x
- 4 6-9x
- 5 10-19x
- 6 20-39x
- 7 40+ Occasions

V2116: MJ+HS LAST 12 MOS

On how many occasions (if any) have you used marijuana or hashish during the last 12 months?

- 1 0 Occasions
- 2 1-2x
- 3 3-5x
- 4 6-9x
- 5 10-19x
- 6 20-39x
- 7 40+ Occasions

V2119: LSD LAST 12 MOS

On how many occasions (if any) have you used LSD during the last 12 months?

- 1 0 Occasions
- 2 1-2x
- 3 3-5x
- 4 6-9x
- 5 10-19x
- 6 20-39x
- 7 40+ Occasions



V2122: PSYD LAST 12 MOS

On how many occasions (if any) have you used psychedelics during the last 12 months?

- 1 0 Occasions
- 2 1-2x
- 3 3-5x
- 4 6-9x
- 5 10-19x
- 6 20-39x
- 7 40+ Occasions

V2125: COKE LAST 12 MOS

On how many occasions (if any) have you used cocaine during the last 12 months?

- 1 0 Occasions
- 2 1-2x
- 3 3-5x
- 4 6-9x
- 5 10-19x
- 6 20-39x
- 7 40+ Occasions

V2128: AMPH LAST 12 MOS

On how many occasions (if any) have you used amphetamines during the last 12 months?

- 1 0 Occasions
- 2 1-2x
- 3 3-5x
- 4 6-9x
- 5 10-19x
- 6 20-39x
- 7 40+ Occasions

V2134: BARB LAST 12 MOS

On how many occasions (if any) have you used barbiturates during the last 12 months?

- 1 0 Occasions
- 2 1-2x
- 3 3-5x
- 4 6-9x
- 5 10-19x
- 6 20-39x
- 7 40+ Occasions

V2137: TRQL LAST 12 MOS

On how many occasions (if any) have you used tranquilizers during the last 12 months?

- 1 0 Occasions
- 2 1-2x
- 3 3-5x
- 4 6-9x
- 5 10-19x
- 6 20-39x
- 7 40+ Occasions

V2140: H LAST 12 MOS

On how many occasions (if any) have you used heroin during the last 12 months?

- 1 0 Occasions
- 2 1-2x
- 3 3-5x
- 4 6-9x
- 5 10-19x
- 6 20-39x
- 7 40+ Occasions

V2143: NARC LAST 12 MOS

On how many occasions (if any) have you used other narcotics during the last 12 months?

- 1 0 Occasions
- 2 1-2x
- 3 3-5x
- 4 6-9x
- 5 10-19x
- 6 20-39x
- 7 40+ Occasions

V2146: INHL LAST 12 MOS

On how many occasions (if any) have you used inhalants during the last 12 months?

- 1 0 Occasions
- 2 1-2x
- 3 3-5x
- 4 6-9x
- 5 10-19x
- 6 20-39x
- 7 40+ Occasions

V2225: US 2 MUCH PROFIT

[How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?] In the United States, we put too much emphasis on making profits and not enough on human well-being.

- 1 Disagree
- 2 Mostly Disagree
- 3 Neither
- 4 Mostly Agree
- 5 Agree

V2226: 2MUCH CNCRN MTRL

[How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?] People are too much concerned with material things these days.

- 1 Disagree
- 2 Mostly Disagree
- 3 Neither
- 4 Mostly Agree
- 5 Agree

V2227: ENCOURG PPL BUY>

[How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?] Since it helps the economy to grow, people should be encouraged to buy more.

- 1 Disagree
- 2 Mostly Disagree
- 3 Neither
- 4 Mostly Agree
- 5 Agree

V2228: WRNG ADVERTISING

[How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?] There is nothing wrong with advertising that gets people to buy things they don't really need.

- 1 Disagree
- 2 Mostly Disagree
- 3 Neither
- 4 Mostly Agree
- 5 Agree

V2229: MOR SHORTGS FUTR

[How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?] There will probably be more shortages in the future, so Americans will have to learn how to be happy with fewer things.

- 1 Disagree
- 2 Mostly Disagree
- 3 Neither
- 4 Mostly Agree
- 5 Agree

V2240: LIKLY STAY MARRD

If I marry, I plan to stay married.

- 1 Very Unlikely
- 2 Fairly Unlikely
- 3 Uncertain
- 4 Fairly Likely
- 5 Very Likely

V2259: INTEREST IN GOVT

Some people thing about what's going on in government very often, and others are not that interested. How much of an interest do you take in government and current events?

- 1 No interest
- 2 Little interest
- 3 Some interest
- 4 A lot of interest
- 5 Very great interest

V2260: GOVT PPL DSHNST

Do you think some of the people running the government are crooked or dishonest?

- 1 Most are crooked
- 2 Quite a few are
- 3 Some
- 4 Hardly any
- 5 Non at all

V2261: GOVT DSNT WASTE\$

Do you think the government wastes much of the money we pay in taxes?

- 1 Nearly all
- 2 A lot
- 3 Some
- 4 A little
- 5 No waste

V2262: NEVER TRUST GOVT

How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?

- 1 Always trust
- 2 Often
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Seldom
- 5 Never

V2263: GVT PPL DK DOING

Do you feel that the people running the government are smart people who usually know what they are doing?

- 1 Always know
- 2 Usually
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Seldom
- 5 Never

V2264: GOVT RUN FOR PPL

Would you say the government is pretty much run for a few big interests looking out for themselves, or is it run for the benefit of all the people?

- 1 Always for a few
- 2 Usually for a few
- 3 Sometimes for a few
- 4 Usually for all
- 5 Always for all

V2265: DO OR PLN VOTE

[Have you ever done, or do you plan to do the following things?] Vote in a public election?

- 1 Probably won't
- 2 Don't know
- 3 Probably will
- 4 Have done

V2266: DO OR PLN WRITE

[Have you ever done, or do you plan to do the following things?] Write to public officials?

- 1 Probably won't
- 2 Don't know
- 3 Probably will
- 4 Have done

v2267: DO OR PLN GIVE \$

[Have you ever done, or do you plan to do the following things?] Give money to a political candidate or cause?

- 1 Probably won't
- 2 Don't know
- 3 Probably will
- 4 Have done

V2268: DO OR PLN WK CPG

[Have you ever done, or do you plan to do the following things?] Work in a political campaign?

- 1 Probably won't
- 2 Don't know
- 3 Probably will
- 4 Have done

V2269: DO OR PLN DEMSTR

[Have you ever done, or do you plan to do the following things?] Participate in a lawful demonstration?

- 1 Probably won't
- 2 Don't know
- 3 Probably will
- 4 Have done

V2270: DO OR PLN BOYCOT

[Have you ever done, or do you plan to do the following things?] Boycott certain products or stores?

- 1 Probably won't
- 2 Don't know
- 3 Probably will
- 4 Have done

V2279: FRQ FIGHT PARNTS

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Argued or had a fight with either of your parents?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2280: FRQ HIT SUPRVISR

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Hit an instructor or supervisor?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2281: FRQ FGT WRK/SCHL

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Gotten into a serious fight in school or at work?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2282: FRQ GANG FIGHT

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Taken part in a fight where a group of your friends were against another group?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2283: FRQ HURT SM1 BAD

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Hurt someone badly enough to need bandages or a doctor?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2284: FRQ THREAT WEAPN

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Used a knife or gun or some other thing (like a club) to get something from a person?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2285: FRQ STEAL <\$50

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Taken something not belonging to you worth under \$50?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2286: FRQ STEAL >\$50

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Taken something not belonging to you worth over \$50?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2287: FRQ SHOPLIFT

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Taken something from a store without paying for it?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times



V2288: FRQ CAR THEFT

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Taken a car that didn't belong to someone in your family without permission of the owner.

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2289: FRQ STEAL CAR PT

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Taken part of a car without permission of the owner?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2290: FRQ TRESPAS BLDG

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Gone into some house or building when you weren't supposed to be there?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2291: FRQ ARSON

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Set fire to someone's property on purpose?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2292: FRQ DMG SCH PRPTY

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Damaged school property on purpose?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2293: FRQ DMG WK PRPTY

[During the last 12 months, how often have you] Damaged property at work on purpose?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Once
- 3 Twice
- 4 3-4 Times
- 5 5+ Times

V2328: 2MCH COMPTN SCTY

[How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?] There is too much competition in this society?

- 1 Disagree
- 2 Mostly Disagree
- 3 Neither
- 4 Mostly Agree
- 5 Agree

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